

WIDE AWAKE PAGE FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

Edited by MARY MARSHALL

The Priest of Buddha; A Tale of Ceylon

By G. S. GOODMAN.

Last year, while on a visit to Ceylon, my cousin, who has lived in the East Indies since he was a boy, told me the following strange tale:

Last month, having paid the coolies upon the various sections of the main road to Katchou, I returned the heavy wooden cash box to my headquarters, and placing some 700 rupees due to contractors at Mattagam in my breast pocket, set out from Dibile on the bridge path which leads to that place, at about 5 p. m. The total distance to Mattagam was twenty-two miles. It was thus out of the question to reach there that evening, but I had determined to pass the night at the Ambulam, a rough halting-place for travelers.

Surrounding the building on either hand were several sheds with thatched roofs and mud walls, built for the convenience of the pilgrims, who at the various festivities traveled to worship at the famous Dagoba of Mattagam. As I approached, the whole was flooded by the moonlight, the sombre outlines of the Ambulam giving it a forbidding and gloomy aspect. It was a lovely spot in the heart of the jungle, eleven long miles of continuous trees between it and the cart road.

To my astonishment there were no signs of my servants, whom I had sent on ahead. It at once flashed upon me that they had lost their way—an easy mistake to make among the many windings and offshoots of a jungle path.

Having tethered the horse in the stall at the side, I ascended the steps slowly. Attracted by a slight noise in one of the corners, I turned just in time to see a figure spring up from a long, low stool.

The man's sudden appearance gave me a start, but upon my calling out to him in Tamil he approached and stood in the light of the moon, where I had a full view of him. He was nothing but one of the ordinary caste of Buddhist priests, one sees so frequently, with completely shaven head, snaky gleaming eyes, and the vile cunning expression which characterizes them all. He saluted me deeply, but being a Singhalese and not understanding my Tamil, I was unable to obtain any information regarding my servants, even if he had chanced to know of their whereabouts.

I spread my bed in the corner most remote from my unwelcome companion, his glittering eyes followed my every movement.

He had lit an ordinary square lantern, and placed it above himself upon the low wall, by the light of which he was pretending to read. Our eyes met, and his two sinister orbs dropped below the level of the top of the book. There was something in them that made my skin creep; why, I could not explain. Having taken a last look at my horse, I arranged my scant accommodations as well as circumstances would allow, with my back to the wall facing the priest.

Heavy clouds had swept up from the horizon obscuring moon and stars, and all without was inky darkness. The priest sat in the center of a circle of light, which was vivified by the brightness of his yellow robe, making an unpleasant contrast with the blackness around and behind. A dim, miserable light pervaded the rest of the place.

My wandering thoughts again became attracted by the priest, the book was slowly and cautiously lowered, and once more met the gaze above. Again that something in it made me shiver. Although he could not see whether my eyes were opened or closed in my dark corner, his jet black pupils or their white grounds seemed to be looking straight at and through them into my inmost being; the rays of the book was as the shutting out of a blinding light.

I again lay watching the flickering shadow of the huge black cross-beams and listening to the impatient stamp of the horse, the gentle falling and splashing of the water below, with its wavering irregularities, caused by the winds, the buzzing of the insects, and listening to those distant sounds, until the fatigue of the day overcoming me, my eyes closed with weariness.

I opened them again suddenly to find the priest sitting bolt upright, his evil gaze concentrated upon me with an intensity that held me spell-bound. I felt that I wished to shout, but was powerless to do so. The place seemed filled with a terrible atmosphere of silence—a great inexplicable ever-increasing silence, making the sounds without seem as though outside my consciousness, which seemed to have converged into that yellow circle from the center of which gleamed those awful eyes.

I strove to hide them with my hands, but the slightest movement was beyond my control. Terror gained complete mastery; I distinctly felt the hairs of my head bristling. The hairs, at first the chief feature of that burning stare, suddenly changed to a look of gratified malignancy such as might have lit up the countenance of some ancient priest as his fiendish brain invented a new and execrable torture for a special enemy.

He moved, just in time it seemed



I saw it slowly raise its head gently swaying to and fro

to save my brain bursting; for up to that not one single change had taken place either in his gaze or body.

Without removing his eyes from me for one instant, he leaned over and picked up from beneath the bench a small black box. I thought I detected a faint hiss. Cautiously, his eyes still fixed upon me, he placed the box upon the form, and feeling in the folds of his yellow gown for a key, unlocked and opened it.

The hooded head of a cobra shot up into the light.

He seized it swiftly by the neck—I remember wondering in a feeble way why it made no attempt to bite him, but the feeling passed at once. Silently, noiselessly, he glided toward me, the lantern in one hand, the cobra in the other, his immobile face showing no change save in malice-charged eyes, which seemed to hold more horror for me than the snake.

Flashing the lantern upon my face, that he might the better observe the agony of my fear, he held the cobra suspended above my chest, and then deliberately allowed it to drop.

It reared with an angry hiss, but evidently liking the warmth, coiled itself. Placing the lantern upon the wall behind, the vile brute folded his arms and surveyed me with a look of cruel triumph.

The silence began once more to intensify. I felt the weight of the sleeping death upon me, again the soft, dream-like sounds were borne from afar, and there came that great longing to call out, to shout, to shriek.

Then, as though he had seen my suffering with his mind as he could have watched me struggling beneath a death-like weight with his eyes, with a gesture betokening a satisfaction which I seemed to feel, he raised his hands in preliminary mesmeric passes before the sleeping snake. I felt it quiver and move upon my breast.

Feeling my eyes free to look, although those of the priest had not left me, I saw it slowly raise its head, gently swaying to and fro, its little beady eyes glittering like diamonds.

Then, as though obeying the will of the priest, it turned toward me. Then came a vain longing for rescue from the fearsome and unnatural death. But the utter hopelessness of the situation crushed me. Save for the multitudinous who went to and from the place twice a year, the road was almost entirely deserted by travelers.

The Europeans who visited the Am-

bulam might be counted upon the fingers of one hand. My native servant I knew would certainly camp near the first stream upon the approach of night. I seemed to see the thirty-five miles of road that separated me from the nearest bungalow, where I knew a dozen good fellows were making merry, little dreaming of my terrible plight.

Higher and higher rose the head with its increasing reptilian oscillations; then stopped. The movements of the priest grew quicker, the blue and white circles around the belly of the snake became alternately glowing and lustreless, according as his hands swept inward and outward or downward and upward. The body swelling and distending at every pass, until its rounded coils and shining scintillating circles and gaping rat-like mouth seemed to fill all space before me—slowly, very slowly, and gradually bent backwards. I felt it strike just into one eyeball and then the other, in rapid succession. My senses were leaving me, the varied colors flashed, the glowing body expanded until I saw nothing but it and those awful eyes as two flaming suns above. It would strike! Now! I felt it coming! With a yell that resounded in the jungle around, I awoke, just in time to catch the drooping eyes of the priest—who had not stirred from his seat.

He suddenly got up, blew out his lantern, and lay down once more in the moonlight, with his face to the wall.

My head and body were streaming with perspiration. I sat up and looked round, when, to my astonishment, there, beneath the bench, lay the identical box of my dreams. I did not go to sleep again that night, for obvious reasons. In the morning at daybreak, with American assurance, I demanded to see the contents of the box. It was a cobra.

My servants, it appeared, had halted the previous night within one mile of the Ambulam, thoroughly worn out, having missed the way twice before, and, they imagined, a third time.

Having partaken of a good early tea, and seen that my horse received similar good treatment, I set off for Mattagam. Looking back once before losing sight of the Ambulam, I caught the glance of the priest for the last time in the sunlight, cringing and subservient.

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He struggled furiously, but we were desperate

The Baffled Mutineers

By ALEC. C. PEARSON.

"What is the matter, Tom? What do you want?"

"Eh?"

"Didn't you call out just now?"

"No."

There was a glimmer of starlight coming through the port of the half-deck, and by it I looked at my watch.

"Exactly 2 o'clock," I said.

"Two hours more for sleep," remarked Tom Milligan. But instead of attempting to continue his disturbed slumbers he remained sitting up in his bunk with his head bent forward in a listening attitude.

Tom Milligan and I were fellow-apprentices in the same watch on board the old merchant ship Cleopatra, a fine wooden frigate-built ship of a thousand tons register. There were four of us altogether in the half-deck, the other two apprentices, Jerry Winfield and Podge Barrett, being in the second mate's watch.

The Cleopatra was bound from the small and little-known port of Ynadons, Western Australia, to the well-known port of Adelaide, South Australia, and was four days out from the former place. With the exception of a matter of twelve cases containing gold in nuggets and ingots, valued at a little over \$60,000, that were stowed away in the after-hold, the ship was in ballast.

"Look here, Tom," I said after a minute's silence. "I don't somehow feel like going to sleep again just yet, so I shall go out on deck and see what the weather is like."

Jumping out of my bunk, I slipped on my trousers, and, crossing over to the berth door, I turned the handle. The door was locked!

"We are fastened in, Tom!" I cried.

Tom Milligan was out of his bunk in a second, shaking at the door fiercely.

"The key is on the outside," he exclaimed. "It has been moved."

There was the sound of a heavy foot-step on the deck, and Tom rattled the door again.

"Who is outside there?" he shouted.

"Unlock this door, will you?"

"The door will be unlocked presently," replied a gruff voice. "Don't make such a hullabaloo!"

"Is that you, Prout?" I asked.

"Yes," answered the man.

"Why are we locked in our berths?"

"To keep you out of mischief. But the boss is coming along presently to talk to you, and you'll learn all that's good for you to know."

"The boss?"

"Yes, Jim Hurst. He's in charge of this 'ere locker now."

Tom and I exchanged glances.

"What does it mean?" I whispered.

"Mutiny!" he replied in a hard voice.

"Where are the captain and officers?" he demanded of Prout.

"Safe under lock and key, the same as you are," replied the fellow. "But here comes Jim Hurst."

The door was flung open and Hurst, a hulking ruffian, appeared with three others of the mutineers. We noticed that they all carried revolvers.

"If you promise, said Hurst, 'never to say a word of what you see and hear aboard this ship for the next few days, why, you shall have full liberty and may be a nugget of gold apiece at the end of the trip.'"

With a parting injunction from Hurst not to attempt to break out of the berth if we valued our lives, the door was locked upon us and we were left to our own reflections.

It may be guessed that they were far from pleasant ones, particularly when we had one of the mates' account of what had taken place. From him we learned that the crew, most of them armed with revolvers, had crept aft, overpowered the second mate and afterward the captain and chief mate, who were sleeping below, and seized the ship.

"As far as I could gather from the remarks the scoundrels let fall," he went on, "they intend to run the ship ashore on Rowley Island, stow the gold in the boat, and then steer for the mainland."

"Well, what is to be done?" I said.

"We have to decide by breakfast-time. For my part I would sooner be marooned than become an associate of mutineers."

"The same here," exclaimed Podge Barrett, another mate.

The after-hatch of the Cleopatra was situated in the space between the break of the poop and the deck-house occupied by us four apprentices. The door of our berth opened aft, so that when we stepped out on deck we were within a few feet of the coamings of the hatchway.

It was down in this afterhold that the cases of gold were stowed, and, of course, the hatches were barred and padlocked. The mutineers, however, had secured the keys, which were always kept in the chief mate's cabin, and shortly after 7 o'clock in the morning we heard them unlocking the bars and removing the hatches.

Jerry, watching the operation through the keyhole of the door, whispered excitedly, "They are going down below to break open the cases and share out the gold."

"Already!" said Tom with a quiet smile. "Can you see how many of the fellows are going below, Jerry?"

"The whole lot of them, except the man at the wheel and one fellow that they have left to keep a look-out on deck," said Jerry.

"Who is the look-out man?"

"Prout."

"Now, you fellows listen to me," exclaimed Tom, "if luck hasn't deserted



And there crouching in the long grass, was the tiger!

Diddy Dunk and the Tiger

By RALPH RODMAN.

us, we will recapture this ship from the mutineers while they are still gloating over the gold they hope to steal."

We all bent our heads together while Tom Milligan unfolded his plan to us. Briefly, it was as follows:

We were to call and ask Prout to hand in some drinking water, a request he was scarcely likely to refuse, and as soon as he opened the door a blanket was to be thrown over his head, he was to be gagged and bound, and put up in the berth. Then the afterhatches were to be clapped on, thus shutting the mutineers up in the hold, the helmsman, even if he guessed what was taking place, could scarcely interfere, as there was a fresh breeze blowing, and if he quitted the wheel there would be grave risk of the ship swinging up in the wind, being taken aback and sending all the masts over the side.

"The success of the plan," said Tom in conclusion, "will greatly depend upon whether we can induce Prout to open the door. Now, are we all ready?"

"All ready!" I whispered.

Tom and I stood, one on each side of the door, with blankets, Jerry Winfield had a couple of chest lashings handy, and Podge held a piece of wood that was to serve as a gag.

"Sing out for the water, Podge," said Tom. "Not through the port, or the wind will get in that way. Through the keyhole, then he will be more likely to open the door."

Podge nodded, and putting his mouth to the keyhole called out:

"Will you please hand us in some drinking water, Prout? We have nothing in here to drink," which was true. Prout slouched off to the water-but and filled a tin pot.

Before he could complete the sentence Tom and I had flung the blankets over his head and shoulders and dragged him headlong into the berth. He struggled furiously, but we were desperate, and in three minutes we had him gagged and securely bound with the chest lashings.

"Now, then, boys! Quick! On with the hatches!" cried Tom.

Podge Barrett and I seized one, Jerry Winfield and Tom the other, and they were clapped on in a jiffy. Then the iron hatch bars were dragged across and the padlocks inserted in the staples. We heard a furious shouting down below, and the helmsman roared out to know what was the matter.

Tom Milligan had possessed himself of the revolver which Prout had carried in his belt, and, mounting on to the poop, coolly ordered the helmsman to attend to his steering and hold his tongue, which he did.

In the meantime Jerry Winfield had descended to the cabin to release the captain and mates, while Podge Barrett sat on the after-hatch smiling placidly.

"Take off those hatches, do you hear?" roared Jim Hurst. "If you ain't quick about it I will pitch you overboard when I come on deck."

"When you come on deck," replied Podge calmly, "the ship will be in port and a few police will be waiting to receive you, ah, here comes the captain and chief officer."

"The cap'n and mate!" muttered Hurst. "We're done, boys!"

As the weather remained fine, the captain, mates and apprentices managed to sail the Cleopatra without difficulty to Perth, the nearest port of any importance, where we arrived four days later. There the mutineers were handed over to the civil authorities, to await their trial for mutiny on the high seas.

As Podge Barrett watched them being marched away, he muttered thoughtfully, "I wonder where we should have been by this time if Prout had passed the water in through the port instead of through the door."

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hung up on a snag, and became painfully conscious of some animal moving and breathing audibly a few yards from the foot of the tree, and, looking down, felt his hair rise and he dimly caught sight of a moving form.

The thought, "Tigers can't climb," was dashed by the further chilling consideration. "But it could jump as high as this," and he shivered, though the night was warm. Diddy had no hesitation in admitting to himself that he was horribly scared—how much so was evidenced by the fact that he never thought of blaming his chums for their desertion of him. Indeed, he thought of nothing but his own terrible position. He shut his eyes tight, but soon opened them again, fascinated by that awful creature below. No movement was now apparent, but that something was there—a few yards from the tree—was terribly evident. The moon, rising higher, shone through the branches, and there, crouching in the long grass, was the tiger, sure enough! The striped skin was plainly distinguishable—the crouching pose that of a gigantic member of the cat tribe alone!

Still there was no movement on the part of the tiger. "Gone to sleep," thought the captive Diddy, and for a moment wild thoughts of trying to silently escape swam across the poor boy's mind. But too well did he know that any attempt to descend the tree would probably rouse the sleeping brute and call his attention to the toothsome Diddy not far above his head.

He realized that his only chance of safety lay in the maintenance of perfect immobility and silence. Higher and higher rose the moon, and more and more plainly visible grew the black stripes on their tawny ground.

How slowly the time was going—he could never spend the whole night there! Oh, if only the menagerie people would come that way in their hunt! Gladly would he have welcomed capture in the orchard as the price of deliverance; but he did not dare to shout.

After what seemed an interminable time welcome sounds were heard down the road. Brown and his two frightened companions on reaching the school had not dared to keep quiet, but had at once taken the other inmates of their dormitory into their confidence. Mussy Dunk was wild with concern on Diddy's account, and insisted on arousing the house-master at once, that a rescue party might be organized forthwith.

To make a long story short, the master was aroused, the whole school alarmed, and in a quarter of an hour a rescue party of various sorts was on its way to the scene of Diddy's perilous detention—a messenger having been sent off to the market-place over a mile away to tell the menagerie people of the whereabouts of their tiger, and to request them to send keepers for his recapture as quickly as possible.

The road to the orchard was covered at double-quick time. Diddy was soon called out; in fact, he had not retired, a sick horse needing attention. "A tiger in my orchard?" he cried incredulously. "Hold hard till I get my gun! And I'll speak as a vet!" followed by his big dog, who knew every boy in the school, he led the way to the orchard. Rover straightaway ran to the tree which contained the frightened Diddy—who had not ventured to utter a sound, for fear the tiger should make a meal of him before his rescuers could reach him. But Rover only looked up into the tree, and wagged his tail.

Hastening near to the dog, and not too eagerly followed by the rest, Farmer Bowles suddenly stopped, and, to the amazement of the company, burst into a roar of laughter, and, as soon as he could speak as a vet, he declared, "This is a good one, this is! Ho! ho! Why, it's my buggery bug that the youngsters have been playing with today!"

The striped rug was picked up from the log over which it had been hung by Farmer Bowles' children, and forgotten, and served as a hammock ambulance for Diddy, who was too cramped and exhausted to walk. What moving animal had been seen by the orchard-robbing boys is still unknown, though a gap, discovered next day, in the hedge between the orchard and a pasture field in which sheep were feeding, may be regarded as suggestive of a solution of the question.

The farmer, backed by his kindly wife, insisted on keeping Diddy for the night. "The poor boy isn't fit to go back to school," he declared. Just as the rest departed the messenger who had been dispatched to the town came hurrying up with the information that the tiger had been recaptured—crouching under a cart in a back yard—within an hour of his escape, and not two hundred yards from the menagerie.

Some hours' sleep and a good farmhouse breakfast set Diddy on his feet again, and the farmer dismissed him with his pockets full of apples, and with a hint that the next time he wanted any, it might be better for him to call on the house and ask for them. Diddy said he would, and faithfully fulfilled his promise afterwards.

He sought the school with considerable perturbation, and was accorded an interview—not at all by his own desire—with Dr. Womburn without delay. What the doctor said to him need not be related here. After the interview he was not in a condition either bodily or mentally, to desire to climb trees of any kind for a few days—a disability which was shared by the other three raiders.